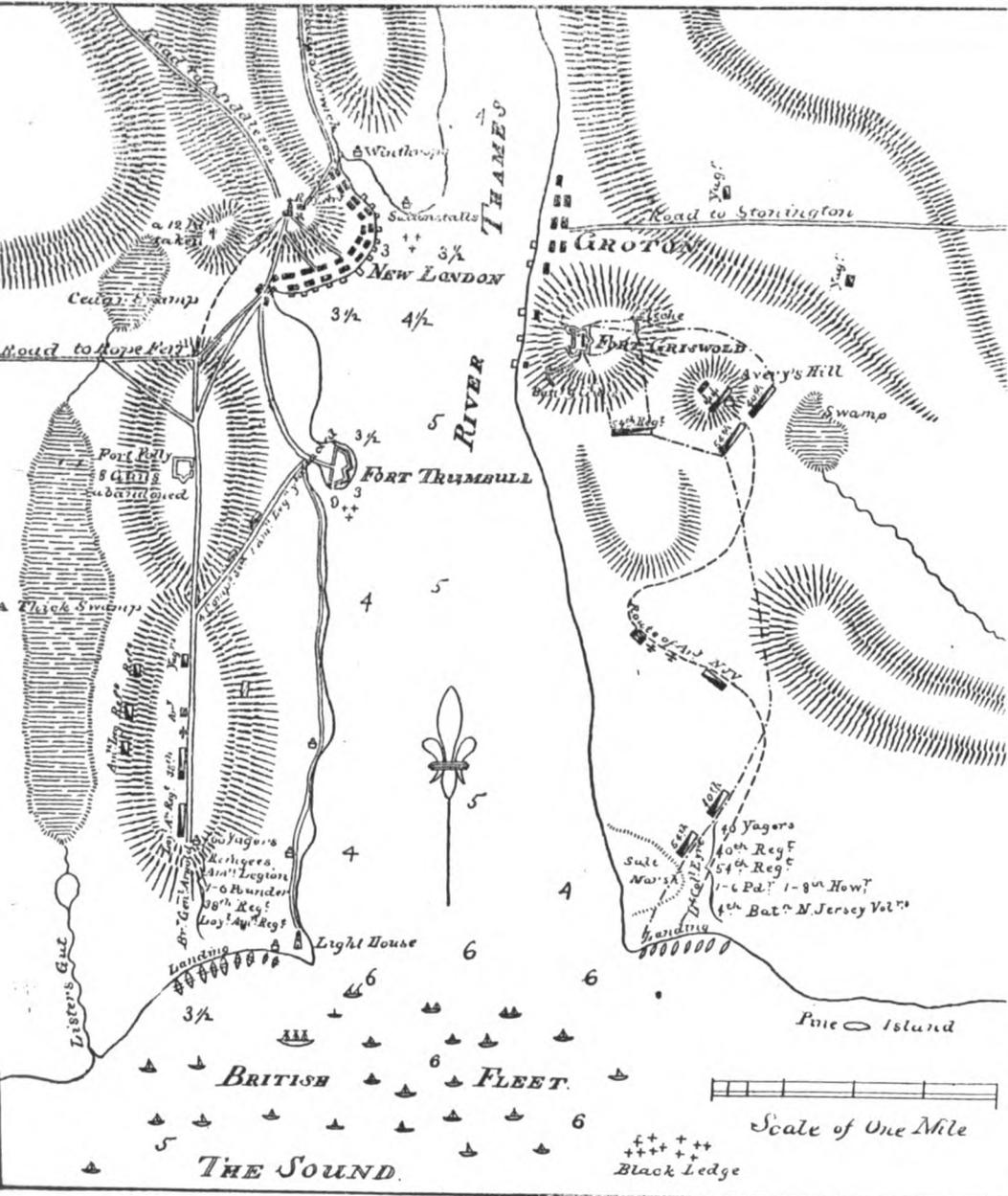


A SKETCH of NEW LONDON & GROTON

with the attacks made on.

FORTS TRUMBULL & CRISWOLD by the BRITISH TROOPS
under the Command of BRIG. GEN. ARNOLD Sep. 6th 1776.



THE BATTLE
OF
GROTON HEIGHTS:

A COLLECTION OF NARRATIVES, OFFICIAL REPORTS,
RECORDS, ETC.

OF THE

STORMING OF FORT GRISWOLD,

THE MASSACRE OF ITS GARRISON, AND THE BURNING OF NEW
LONDON BY BRITISH TROOPS UNDER THE COMMAND
OF BRIG.-GEN. BENEDICT ARNOLD,

ON THE SIXTH OF SEPTEMBER, 1781.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES.

Harris
BY WILLIAM W. HARRIS.

ILLUSTRATED WITH ENGRAVINGS AND MAPS.

REVISED AND ENLARGED, WITH ADDITIONAL NOTES,

By CHARLES ALLYN.

"Zebulon and Naphtali were a people that jeopardized their lives unto the death in the high places
of the field." — *Judges, 5 Chapt. 18 Verse.*

[Inscription on Monument.]

*3**
NEW LONDON, CT.:
CHARLES ALLYN.
1882.

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1882, Mar. 25,

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NARRATIVE
OF
STEPHEN HEMPSTEAD.¹

ON the morning of the 6th of September, 1781, twenty-four sail of the enemy's shipping appeared to the westward of New London harbor. The enemy landed in two divisions, of about 800 men each, commanded by that infamous traitor to his country, Benedict Arnold, who headed the division that landed on the New London side, near Brown's farms; the other division, commanded by Colonel Ayres, landed on Groton Point, nearly opposite. I was first sergeant of Captain Adam Shapley's company of state troops, and was stationed with him at the time, with about twenty-three men, at Fort Trumbull, on the New London side. This was a mere breast-work or water battery,

¹ This narrative was communicated to the *Missouri Republican* in 1826, accompanied by the following note of which I have seen but one printed copy. — A.

"Mr. Charles I have thought since last fall that I would send you an account of the battle of Fort Griswold on Groton Heights on the 6th of September 1781. The celebration of that event in September last caused several notices of it to appear in different newspapers none of which I think are sufficiently particular or wholly correct. As I was a participant in that catastrophe and had an opportunity of knowing most of the circumstances, and reasons for remembering them, besides some notes taken subsequently, I am enabled I think to give a clearer account of it (particularly in detail) than any I have seen, and if you believe the following worthy of publication, you are at liberty to do so.

"STEPHEN HEMPSTEAD."

open from behind, and the enemy coming on us from that quarter, we spiked our cannon, and commenced a retreat across the river to Fort Griswold in three boats. The enemy was so near that they over-shot us with their muskets, and succeeded in capturing one boat with six men commanded by Josiah Smith, a private. They afterwards proceeded to New London and burnt the town. We were received by the garrison with enthusiasm, being considered experienced artilleryists, whom they much needed, and we were immediately assigned to our stations. The fort was an oblong square, with bastions at opposite angles, its longest side fronting the river in a northwest and southeast direction. Its walls were of stone, and were ten or twelve feet high on the lower side, and surrounded by a ditch. On the wall were pickets, projecting over twelve feet; above this was a parapet with embrasures, and within a platform for the cannon, and a step to mount upon to shoot over the parapet with small arms. In the southwest bastion was a flag-staff, and in the side, near the opposite angle, was the gate, in front of which was a triangular breast-work to protect the gate; and to the right of this was a redoubt, with a three-pounder in it, which was about 120 yards from the gate. Between the fort and the river was another battery, with a covered way, but which could not be used in this attack, as the enemy appeared in a different quarter. The garrison, with the volunteers, consisted of about 160 men. Soon after our arrival the enemy appeared in force in some woods about half a mile southeast of the fort, from whence they sent a flag of truce, which was met by Captain Shapley, demanding an unconditional surrender, threatening at the same time, to storm the fort instantly if the terms were not

accepted.¹ A council of war was held, and it was the unanimous voice, that the garrison were unable to defend themselves against so superior a force. But a militia colonel who was then in the fort, and had a body of men in the immediate vicinity, said he would reinforce them with 2 or 300 men in fifteen minutes, if they would hold out. Colonel Ledyard agreed to send back a defiance, upon the most solemn assurance of immediate succor. For this purpose Colonel —— started, his men being then in sight; but he was no more seen, nor did he even attempt a diversion in our favor. When the answer to their demand had been returned by Captain Shapley, the enemy were soon in motion, and marched with great rapidity, in a solid column, to within a short distance of the fort, where, dividing the column, they rushed furiously and simultaneously to the assault of the southwest bastion and the opposite sides. They were, however, repulsed with great slaughter, their commander mortally wounded, and Major Montgomery, next in rank, killed, having been thrust through the body, whilst in the act of scaling the walls at the southwest bastion, by Captain Shapley. The command then devolved on Colonel Beckwith, a refugee from New Jersey, who commanded a corps of that description. The enemy rallied and returned the attack with great vigor, but were received and repulsed with equal firmness. During the attack a shot cut the halyards of the flag, and it fell to the ground, but was instantly remounted on a pike-pole.²

¹ Lieutenant-colonel Eyre formed his men behind the ledge of rocks which forms the eastern boundary of the burial-ground. Major Montgomery's column formed in the rear of a hillock, a short distance north-east of that point.

² Luke Perkins is said, without contradiction as far as I can learn, to have been the one who performed the action here described.—A.

This accident proved fatal to us, as the enemy supposed it had been struck by its defenders, rallied again, and rushing with redoubled impetuosity, carried the southwest bastion by storm. Until this moment our loss was trifling in number, being six or seven killed, and eighteen or twenty wounded. Never was a post more bravely defended, nor a garrison more barbarously butchered. We fought with all kinds of weapons, and at all places, with a courage that deserved a better fate.¹ Many of the enemy were killed under the walls by throwing simple shot over on them,² and never

¹ John Daboll, one of the garrison, discharged his musket no less than seven times at one particular soldier, who also seems to have singled him out as his opponent. The singular duel was terminated by the eighth shot from the enemy carrying away the lock of Daboll's musket, and severely wounding him in the head. This incident was related to the writer by an old gentleman now living in Groton, who had frequently heard the story from Daboll. — H.

Thomas, son of Lieutenant Parke Avery, aged seventeen, was killed fighting by the side of his father. Just before he fell (the battle growing hot) the father turned and said, "Tom, my son, do your duty!" "Never fear, father," was the reply, and the next moment he was stretched upon the ground. "'Tis a good cause," said the father, and he remained firm at his post. — *Caulkins*.

Lieut. Avery had another son near three years old at this time named in honor of his fellow-townsmen, one of the Continental agents in France, — Silas Deane Avery. After the battle, in honor of the young hero, Silas Deane was changed for Thomas, a name more strongly demanding of him affection and reverence than that of diplomatic agent or statesman, however eminent, who had not with his blood sealed his belief in resistance to George III. — A.

² Samuel Edgcomb, Jr., of a family justly celebrated for the great size and strength of its members, hurled 18-pound shot, one with each hand, upon the assailants with fearful effect, as they, after breaking through the fraizing attempted to scale the ramparts. After the enemy gained the fort on the other side, and the massacre became general, further resistance being useless, he dropped on the ground among the wounded and dead, escaping with a wound in the right hand. He was afterwards ordered to assist in the removal of the wounded, as his son, Daniel D. Edgcomb, now of Mystic River, remembers his statement that he carried off upon his back

would we have relinquished our arms, had we had the least idea that such a catastrophe would have followed. To describe this scene I must be permitted to go back a little in my narrative. I commanded an eighteen-pounder on the south side of the gate, and while in the act of righting my gun, a ball passed through the embrasure, struck me a little above the right ear, grazing the skull, and cutting off the veins, which bled profusely. A handkerchief was tied around it, and I continued at my duty. Discovering, some little time after, that a British soldier had broken a picket at the bastion on my left, and was forcing himself through the hole, whilst the men stationed there were gazing at the battle which raged opposite to them, cried, "my brave fellows, the enemy are breaking in behind you," and raised my pike to dispatch the intruder, when a ball struck my left arm at the elbow, and my pike fell to the ground. Nevertheless, I grasped it with my right hand, and with the men, who turned and fought manfully, cleared the breach. The enemy, however, soon after forced the southwest bastion, where Captain Shapley, Captain Peter Richards, Lieutenant Richard Chapman, and several other men of distinction, and volunteers, had fought with unconquerable courage, and were all either killed or mortally wounded, and which had sustained the brunt of every attack.

Captain P. Richards, Lieutenant Chapman, and several others, were killed in the bastion; Captain Shap-

Daniel Eldridge, who was wounded in the knee. Samuel E. was ploughing for rye at the time of the alarm and left for the fort at once, not stopping to loose his oxen. He was 21 years of age, and died at the age of 83 years, at the old homestead on the west slope of Fort Hill, in the same house in which he was born. His brother Gilbert was carried away prisoner. — A.

ley and others wounded. He died of his wounds in January¹ following.

Colonel Ledyard, seeing the enemy within the fort, gave orders to cease firing, and to throw down our arms, as the fort had surrendered. We did so, but they continued firing upon us, crossed the fort and opened the gate, when they marched in, firing in platoons upon those who were retreating to the magazine and barrack-rooms for safety. At this moment the renegade Colonel Beckwith commanding, cried out, "Who commands this garrison?" Colonel Ledyard, who was standing near me, answered, "I did sir, but you do now," at the same time stepping forward, handed him his sword with the point towards himself. At this instant I perceived a soldier in the act of bayoneting me from behind. I turned suddenly round and grasped his bayonet, endeavoring to unship it, and knock off the thrust, but in vain. Having but one hand, he succeeded in forcing it into my right hip, above the joint, and just below the abdomen, and crushed me to the ground. The first person I saw afterwards was my brave commander, a corpse by my side, having been run through the body with his own sword, by the savage renegade.² Never was a scene of more brutal wanton carnage witnessed than now took place. The enemy were still firing upon us in platoons, and in the barrack-rooms, which were continued for some minutes, when they discovered they were in danger of being blown up, by communicating fire to the powder

¹ Shapley's death occurred February 14th, as per his tombstone. — A.

² The chivalrous Ledyard seems to have felt a premonition of impending calamity from the beginning. On stepping into the boat to cross from New London on that morning, he remarked to friends gathered about him, "If this day I lose my honor or my life, which it will be, you who know me, can tell already."

scattered at the mouth of the magazine while delivering out cartridges ; nor did it then cease in the rooms for some minutes longer. All this time the bayonet was "freely used," even on those who were helplessly wounded and in the agonies of death. I recollect Captain William Seymour,¹ a volunteer from Hartford, had thirteen bayonet wounds, although his knee had previously been shattered by a ball, so much so, that it was obliged to be amputated the next day. But I need not mention particular cases. I have already said that we had six killed and eighteen wounded previous to their storming our lines ; eighty-five were killed in all, thirty-five mortally and dangerously wounded, and forty taken prisoners to New York, most of them slightly hurt.

After the massacre they plundered us of everything we had, and left us literally naked. When they commenced gathering us up, together with their own wounded, they put theirs under the shade of the platform, and exposed us to the sun, in front of the barracks, where we remained over an hour. Those that could stand were then paraded, and ordered to the landing, while those that could not (of which number I was one) were put in one of our ammunition wagons, and taken to the brow of the hill (which was very steep, and at least one hundred rods in descent), from whence it was permitted to run down by itself, but was arrested in its course, near the river, by an apple-tree. The pain and anguish we all endured in this rapid descent, as the wagon jumped and jostled over rocks and holes, is inconceivable ; and the jar in its arrest was like bursting the cords of life asunder, and caused us to shriek with

¹ Nephew of Colonel Ledyard.

almost supernatural force. Our cries were distinctly heard and noticed on the opposite side of the river (which is a mile wide¹), amidst all the confusion which raged in burning and sacking the town. We remained in the wagon more than an hour before our humane conquerors hunted us up, when we were again paraded and laid on the beach, preparatory to embarkation; but, by the interposition of Ebenezer Ledyard, brother to Colonel Ledyard, who humanely represented our deplorable situation and the impossibility of our being able to reach New York, thirty-five of us were paroled in the usual form. Being near the house of Ebenezer Avery, who was also one of our number, we were taken into it. Here we had not long remained before a marauding party set fire to every room, evidently intending to burn us up with the house. The party soon left it, when it was with difficulty extinguished, and we were thus saved from the flames.² Ebenezer Ledyard again interfered, and obtained a sentinel to remain and guard us until the last of the enemy embarked, — about 11 o'clock at night. None of our own people came to us till near daylight the next morning, not knowing previous to that time that the enemy had departed.

Such a night of distress and anguish was scarcely ever passed by mortal. Thirty-five of us were lying on the bare floor, stiff, mangled, and wounded in every manner, exhausted with pain, fatigue, and loss of blood, without clothes or anything to cover us,

¹ He gives here the popular estimate of the width of the river, current even now. It was measured on the ice in January, 1821, and, from the present ferry wharf to the opposite shore, it was found to be 144 rods, or 16 rods less than half a mile. — A.

² This house is on the right side of the main street, south of the ferry; it is now occupied by Simon Huntington, Esq.

trembling with cold and spasms of extreme anguish without fire or light, parched with excruciating thirst, not a wound dressed, nor a soul to administer to one of our wants, nor an assisting hand to turn us during these long, tedious hours of the night. Nothing but groans and unavailing sighs were heard, and two of our number did not live to see the light of the morning, which brought with it some ministering angels to our relief. The first was in the person of Miss Fanny Ledyard, of Southold, L. I.,¹ then on a visit to her uncle, our murdered commander, who held to my lips a cup of warm chocolate, and soon after returned with wine and other refreshments, which revived us a little. For these kindnesses she has never ceased to receive my most grateful thanks, and fervent prayers for her felicity.

The cruelty of our enemy cannot be conceived, and our renegade countrymen surpassed in this respect, if possible, our British foes. We were at least an hour after the battle within a few steps of a pump in the garrison, well supplied with water, and, although we were suffering with thirst, they would not permit us to take one drop of it, nor give us any themselves. Some of our number, who were not disabled from going to the pump, were repulsed with the bayonet; and not one drop did I taste after the action commenced, although begging for it after I was wounded of all who came near me, until relieved by Miss Ledyard. We were a horrible sight at this time. Our own friends did not know us. Even my own wife came in the room in search of me, and did not recognize me, and

¹ I think there can be no doubt this was a sister of John Ledyard, the traveler, who was a nephew of Colonel Ledyard, and whose mother and sister lived on Long Island at the time. — A.

as I did not see her, she left the room to seek for me among the slain, who had been collected under a large elm-tree near the house. It was with the utmost difficulty that many of them could be identified, and we were frequently called upon to assist their friends in distinguishing them, by remembering particular wounds, &c. Being myself taken out by two men for this purpose, I met my wife and brother, who, after my wounds were dressed by Dr. Downer, from Preston, took me — not to my own home, for that was in ashes, as also every article of my property, furniture, and clothing — but to my brother's, where I lay eleven months as helpless as a child, and to this day feel the effects of it severely.

Such was the battle of Groton Heights ; and such, as far as my imperfect manner and language can describe, a part of the sufferings which we endured. Never, for a moment, have I regretted the share I had in it. I would, for an equal degree of honor, and the prosperity which has resulted to my country from the Revolution, be willing, if possible, to suffer it again.

STEPHEN HEMPSTEAD.





BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
OF
STEPHEN HEMPSTEAD.

STEPHEN HEMPSTEAD, son of Stephen and Sarah Hempstead, lineal descendant of Robert Hempstead, one of the chief settlers of the town, was born in New London, Conn. May 6, 1754. In the summer of 1775 he was lieutenant of a guard of 15 or 20 men under Capt. Nathaniel Saltonstall, which in the first movement to screen the country from invasion, manned the old fort in New London on the parade near the water's edge.

On the spilling of the first American blood at Lexington 19th April, 1775, he volunteered (May 6th) as a private soldier into the service of his country. He went from New London to Boston, served a term of seven months and was present at the affairs of Cambridge, Bunker's (Breed's) Hill, and Roxbury, and had the pleasure to see the British evacuate Boston. Upon the expiration of his first term (December 10th), he entered the service for a second term, as a sergeant in Capt. Nathan Hale's company and marched to New York.

Hale's company was part of Col. Webb's regiment Continental troops.

The British now occupied Long Island and New York city, and the Americans lay on Haerlem Heights.



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STEPHEN HEMPSTEAD, Æ. 76.

A soldier of the Connecticut or Continental Line, from May, 1775, till 1782. In the battle of Bunker Hill; a sergeant under Capt. Nathan Hale; left for dead at Harlem Plains; and wounded in defence of Fort Griswold, September 6, 1781. He died in 1831, aged 77.

Engraved from a miniature painted in St. Louis, Mo., 1830.

General Washington, anxious to know the strength and position of the enemy, engaged Capt. Hale to examine it. Hempstead accompanied him to the point of his departure from the Connecticut shore, took charge of his uniform and valuables that it was not safe to take on a tour through the British camp. As Hale lost his life on this expedition, and his enemies buried him like a dog, Hempstead was the last companion in arms, perhaps the last friend, who saw him.

Mr. Hempstead followed General Washington in the noble retreat from Long Island September, 1776. He, under Thos. Uptide Fosdick, with sixteen men, mostly New London boys, volunteered to go in one of the fireships directed by the General to burn the *Asia*, a man-of-war of 84 guns, then in the Hudson River above New York. Was grappled to her for twenty minutes, and exposed to the fire of the cannon and small arms of the *Asia* and a frigate, without having a man killed; and though unsuccessful, the expedition was so satisfactory to General Washington that he thanked them in General Orders and directed \$40 to be paid to each man. October 27th, Mr. H. was on Haerlem Heights and had two ribs broken by the grape-shot from a British field piece. He was left for dead, and did not recover from his wound till the expiration of his term of service in 1777. The next year he entered into the State service of Connecticut, and on the capture of Fort Trumbull September 6, 1781, he crossed under fire to Fort Griswold on the other side of the river Thames at New London. Here he was again severely wounded. The capture of the fort exposed the town of New London. It was sacked and burnt by the "Traitor Arnold." Mr. Hempstead's family lived there and shared the fate of the place. Their

house and property was destroyed, and his wife, *née* Mary Lewis, with some young children,¹ and afflicted with the small-pox, fled six miles through the country. Mr. Hempstead did not again enter the army. Soon after, the capture of Cornwallis put an end to hostilities. It was twelve months before he recovered of his wounds. He moved to St. Louis in 1811, where he died in 1831.

¹ One of these "young children" was Edward Hempstead, born 1780, afterward first member of Congress from all the country west of the Mississippi River, from whose memoir written 1818 by his friend Col. Thomas H. Benton, author of *Thirty Years in United States Senate*, I have taken much of the above account of Hempstead, Sr. — A.

